



Introduction

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2004*. Since 1997, the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics has published *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*, a report that includes detailed information on a set of key indicators of child well-being. To make better use of its resources, the Forum has decided to update all data annually on its enhanced website (<http://childstats.gov>), and to alternate publishing the more detailed report with a new condensed version—*America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*—that highlights selected indicators. Thus, this July, the Forum is publishing the *Brief*; in July 2005 the Forum will publish the more detailed report, returning to the *Brief* in July 2006.

The indicators and background measures presented in this *Brief* are those that have been reported previously by the Forum. In the mid-1990s, careful consideration was given to selecting a small set of key indicators that describe children's well-being. The 25 key indicators were chosen because they are easy to understand; are based on substantial research connecting them to child well-being; vary across important areas of children's lives; are measured regularly so that they can be updated and show trends over time; and represent large segments of the population, rather than one particular group.

The first section of *America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2004* describes the context in which children live (such as changes in children's family settings and living arrangements). The four sections that follow—economic security, health, behavior and social environment, and education—highlight improvements in children's well-being as well as areas where there has been less progress. This year's report reveals that birth rates for adolescents have continued to decline, victimization rates for youths and violent crime offending rates by youths are down, and high school advanced coursetaking rates are at the highest levels of the past 20 years. However, the prevalence of overweight among U.S. children has increased sharply, and the percentage of children living in poverty rose slightly, while remaining below its recent peak. The *Brief* concludes with a summary list highlighting recent changes in all 25 key indicators. For information on longer-term trends, specific data tables can be accessed on the Forum's website, <http://childstats.gov>.

About the Forum

The Forum fosters coordination and integration among 20 Federal agencies that produce or use statistical data on children and families. The *America's Children* reports provide an accessible compendium of indicators drawn from the most reliable official statistics, and are designed to complement other more specialized, technical, or comprehensive reports produced by various Forum agencies.

For further information

The Forum's website, <http://childstats.gov>, provides the following information:

- [Detailed data tables and figures](#) that display additional data, including trend data, not discussed in this *Brief*.
- [Data source descriptions](#) that provide information about the sources and surveys used to generate the background measures and indicators as well as information on how to contact the agency responsible for collecting the data or administering the relevant survey.
- [Previous *America's Children* reports](#) from 1997 through 2003.
- [Links to Forum agencies, publications, and related reports](#) that offer further information about child and family statistics as well as international comparative data.
- [Information on the Forum](#) that describes its overall structure and organization, other Forum reports, and news on current activities.